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ABSTRACT

North Carolina has been active in its legislative support of site-based management since 1989. A study of the impact of such legislation and how participatory management at the school level has influenced the state's education system is presented. The report is based on data collected for the Task Force on Site-Based Management, which was created by North Carolina's General Assembly. Surveys and focus groups, involving more than 1,100 teachers, principals, and PTA presidents, were conducted over a 2-year period to better understand the perspectives of those in local districts affected by state policies. The text examines whether site-based management is taking hold, whether it is easy for a school to move to collective responsibility, and what elements successful sites have in common, along with shared features evident in less-successful sites. The study presents the state policy context in North Carolina and relates what has been learned about implementing site-based management. The results are presented under the categories of perceptions of effectiveness, perceptions of implementation issues, decision-making power, and other areas of interest. The volume closes with an overview of how schools can get started with site-based management so that all staff are involved. (RJM)

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Reflections on PROGRESS

Site-Based Management and School Improvement in North Carolina

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SERVE
SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education

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Reflecting on PROGRESS

Site-Based Management and School Improvement in North Carolina

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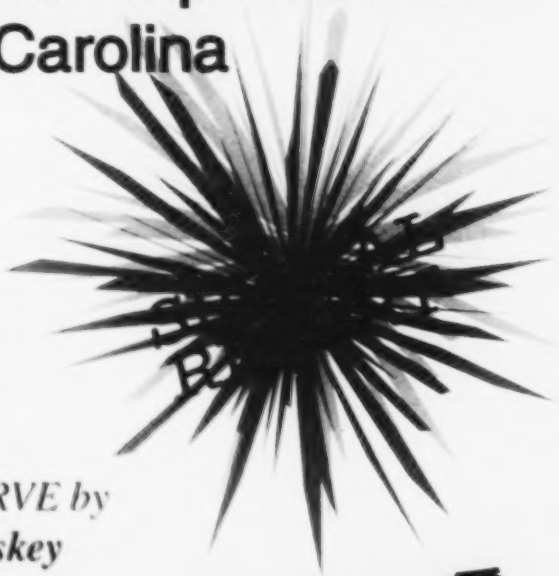

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About the SERVE Organization

SERVE, the SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education, is a consortium of educational organizations whose mission is to promote and support the continual improvement of educational opportunities for all learners in the Southeast. Formed by a coalition of business leaders, governors, policymakers, and educators seeking systemic, lasting improvement in education, the organization is governed and guided by a Board of Directors that includes the chief state school officers, governors, and legislative representatives from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Committed to creating a shared vision of the future of education in the Southeast, the consortium impacts educational change by addressing critical educational issues in the region, acting as a catalyst for positive change, and serving as a resource to individuals and groups striving for comprehensive school improvement.

SERVE's core component is a regional educational laboratory funded since 1990 by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education. Building from this core, SERVE has developed a system of programs and initiatives that provides a spectrum of resources, services, and products for responding effectively to national, regional, state, and local needs. SERVE is a dynamic force, transforming national education reform strategies into progressive policies and viable initiatives at all levels. SERVE Laboratory programs and key activities are centered around

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The Eisenhower Consortium for Mathematics and Science Education at SERVE is part of the national infrastructure for the improvement of mathematics and

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A set of special purpose institutes completes the system of SERVE resources. These institutes provide education stakeholders extended site-based access to high quality professional development programs, evaluation and assessment services, training and policy development to improve school safety, and subject area or project-specific planning and implementation assistance to support clients' school improvement goals.

Following the distributive approach to responding and providing services to its customers, SERVE has ten offices in the region. The North Carolina office at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro is headquarters for the Laboratory's executive services and operations. Policy offices are located in the departments of education in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

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Foreword

A major belief of educational reform in the 1990s has been that more decentralized forms of schooling will lead to improved organizational performance. As a result, many states have enacted legislation that requires stakeholder involvement in a school improvement planning process. The purpose of this report is to explore the impact of such legislation and better understand the challenges involved in implementing a culture of participatory management at the school level. The report focuses on one southeastern state—North Carolina—because of its availability of data on educators' perceptions of site-based management. Although the data are state-specific, the findings are likely to be representative of issues and concerns in all states.

North Carolina has been active in its legislative support of site-based management since 1989. By establishing the Task Force on Site-Based Management, the General Assembly created a mechanism by which the state could adjust site-based management legislation to reflect needs. This report is based on data collected for the Task Force. Surveys and focus groups were conducted over a two-year period to better understand the perspectives of those in local districts affected by the state policies. The members of the Task Force offer special thanks to all of the teachers, parents, principals, school board members, superintendents, and central office staff who participated in the 1994 and 1995 data collection efforts. SERVE provided support for the data collection efforts in the second year because of the belief that these data would be meaningful to educators in our region.

This report was written in several phases. The first draft was developed by Myra Copenhaver, the Director of the Task Force on Site-Based Management at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in 1996. The second draft was developed by Wendy McColskey, SERVE Research Director; Vicky Mikow-Porto, SERVE Policy Analyst serving North Carolina; and Steve Bingham, SERVE Research Associate. The data are taken from two studies (1994 and 1995) prepared by Simmons and Boyle, Inc., and reported to the Task Force. The report also drew heavily from material prepared for the Task Force by Dr. Joseph Murphy from Vanderbilt University. This work represents a collaboration between the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and SERVE. We appreciate the willingness of the Department to share their lessons learned with other educators and policymakers in SERVE's region.

The members of the 1994-96 Task Force on Site-Based Management are listed below.

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Introduction

Underlying almost all recent reform proposals is the assumption that the problems in education can be ascribed to the structure of schooling—that the most serious barrier to progress is the nature of the system itself. The primary change here has been a shift from mechanistic, structure-enhancing strategies to a professional approach to reform, and from regulation, prescription, and monitoring to capacity building and support (Murphy, 1995, pg. 4)

Phrases such as site-based management, shared decision making, participatory governance, and school-based management are often used interchangeably to refer to the process of decentralization in which schools find site-based solutions to site-based problems and needs. The support for site-based management (SBM) is based on a belief that those closest to the situation are in the best position to address the needs of clients—that decisions that directly affect students should be made by those closest to them. The belief is that broad-based involvement in planning and decision making promotes ownership and commitment.

In North Carolina, SBM is defined as

a process and structure for shared decision making at the school site with the goal of improved student performance. It is a shared process in which parents, teachers, the principal, and other school staff are all involved in making many of the decisions for the local school (Questions and Answers about Site-Based Management, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1994).

Is Site-Based Management Taking Hold?

Many public school leaders, supported by state law and local policy, have sought to flatten their organizations through SBM. According to the prevailing model, it is the state's role to articulate content standards and assessment approaches and hold schools accountable for achieving specified student-performance targets, but schools should have control over how to organize to achieve the best results (Odden & Hill, 1996). The commitment to SBM at the national level is demonstrated by the fact that in a 1994 study (Murphy, 1995), nearly two-thirds of the schools in the study reported implementing SBM. Although some of this interest can be attributed to state legislation (much of it initiated in the

early 1990s), many districts were experimenting with various forms of decentralization without state legislation, particularly some major urban districts (Miami, Key West, Chicago, Los Angeles).

With many states enacting or strengthening legislation that encourages more site control over school-improvement issues, how is this change playing out at the local level? In North Carolina, the decentralization legislation began in 1989. Enacted by the General Assembly, it required the implementation of a representative school-improvement council or team responsible for producing a school-improvement plan.

The purpose of this publication is to report on survey data from local educators in North Carolina about the difficulties faced in the early implementation years. The results (along with a summary of the state policy context) are described in the next sections. Although the results are from one state, they mirror very closely findings from national studies; therefore, the results should be informative to those from other states. A concluding section summarizes considerations for state, district, and school leadership roles.

What Does Research Say About the Implementation and Impact of Site-Based Management?

Studies have shown that poorly designed education decentralization can produce little or no effect on teaching and learning (Hannaway, 1998; Malen, Ogawa, and Kranz, 1990). Decisions in schools may be made by different people, but they may not be decisions that affect teaching and learning. Effective SBM requires more than just the existence of a school-improvement team with budget authority. Odden and Hill (1996) suggest that there must be a number of elements present: power over budget and personnel, a teaming structure within the school that supports a professional culture, good school-based information, strong support for teacher professional development, rewards and sanctions, and an emphasis on curriculum and instruction.

Other studies show that thoughtful implementation of school faculty involvement in school improvement (in which a "learning community" is developed) can impact student performance. Successful school-based ownership of school improvement depends on schools functioning as professional communities (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). As professional communities, these schools find a way to channel staff efforts toward helping students produce work of high intellectual quality.

Newman and Wehlage conclude that thoughtful implementation of SBM means that schools "created opportunities for teachers to collaborate. . .and teachers in these schools took collective—not just individual—responsibility for student learning" (1995, pg. 3). Thus, it could be argued that the broadest measure of a successful site-based managed school is the degree to which there is evidence of collective ownership and responsibility for all aspects of the school environment resulting in high-quality student learning and motivation.

Is It Easy for a School to Move from a Traditional, "Each-Teacher-is-an-Island" Culture to a Culture in Which Collective Responsibility Is The Norm?

Researchers from the Professional League of Schools who have studied and supported the implementation of SBM in over 100 schools in Georgia concluded:

> *Trying to change schools into democratic, professional communities where action research and shared governance are focused on schoolwide teaching and learning is not a simple, quick, or one-time task. In fact, people in League schools find this type of schoolwide change, between moments of great exhilaration, to be mainly difficult, slow, and inevitably frustrating work (Allen and Glickman, 1997, pg. 35).*

In some ways, SBM in the service of improved teaching and learning goes against the grain of typical school cultures where teachers teach in isolation, behind closed doors. Schools have not been structured in a way that encourages staff to think of themselves as part of a professional community, accountable to each other, sharing a common vision and purpose. Even the structure of the school day works against such a culture of professional community. The process of creating collective ownership over the quality of the school program when the norm is individual ownership is not likely to happen overnight, but in stages.

> *In spite of the commitment to focus on improving teaching and learning, many of the initial issues focused on by schools dealt with adult concerns such as sign-in procedures, smoking in the teacher's lounge, and improving building maintenance. Over time, in most schools, the issues became more outwardly focused, more concerned with the bigger picture of renewing the school's efforts with students and parents (Allen & Glickman, 1997, pg. 27).*

Sometimes schools move forward, sometimes they reach a plateau, and sometimes they lose ground. In making a presentation about her school's efforts, one principal showed an overhead transparency of a train going down perfectly straight tracks. This is how she hoped the journey to a more democratic, self-reflective school would look. She then showed the same train teetering precariously on tracks that twist and circle off into the distance. This, she reported, is a more accurate depiction of the journey (Allen & Glickman, 1997, pg. 9).

What Elements Do Sites That Have Experienced Success with Site-Based Management Have in Common?

In a recent national study (500 interviews, 44 schools, 13 districts) commissioned by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (U.S. Department of Education), Wohlstetter and Mohrman (1996) focused on how SBM can be accomplished more effectively. They recognize that even within a single district, some schools can make SBM work, and others can't. Their findings suggest reasons for this differential success. They report six strategies found in successful sites and three conditions that existed in less-successful sites.

Strategies Found in Successful Sites

- The establishment of multiple, teacher-led decision-making teams which increase involvement and decrease the work for any one teacher (structural)
- The development of ways to involve and encourage staff in achieving school objectives (structural)
- A focus on continual improvement with schoolwide training in functional and process skills—planning, teamwork, and leadership skills—as well as areas related to curriculum and instruction (training and preparation)
- The creation of a well-developed system for sharing school-related information among a broad range of constituents (power/leadership)
- The selection of principals who can facilitate and manage change (power/leadership)
- The use of district, state, and/or national guidelines to focus reform efforts and to target changes in curriculum and instruction (power/leadership)

Conditions Existing at Less-Successful Sites

- The adoption of SBM as an end in itself, for compliance purposes, without connecting it to the real work of schools (i.e., teaching and learning)
- Principals working from their own agenda, not helping to develop a common goal, thereby discounting teacher professionalism and ownership
- Decision-making power centered in a single council whose members almost invariably experience alienation from the rest of the faculty and who ultimately burnout from overwork

In a decentralized system that stresses employee empowerment and involvement in realizing new visions, the quality of relationships is paramount. A school where teachers and administrators are in conflict or competition, or experiencing a great deal of friction, is unlikely to work well together in solving its problems (Barth, 1990). In North Carolina, legislation that requires the establishment of a school-improvement team has been a starting point for many schools and districts to begin to work together on problems and improvements needed; however, this is only a starting point. Building a collegial culture in a school and finding ways to effectively involve parents and the community is a long, hard journey that requires support and encouragement from all levels.

Chapter One

The State Policy Context in North Carolina

In 1984, Governor James B. Hunt established the Commission on Education for Economic Growth to assess the status of education in North Carolina. The Commission issued a set of recommendations and a plan for "ensuring the future prosperity and well-being of our children and the continuing soundness of the state's economy." In 1985, the North Carolina General Assembly codified a number of the recommendations from the report including legislation that directed the State Board of Education to develop a comprehensive basic education program for all students. The resulting Basic Education Program provided curriculum guidance in the areas of arts, communication, media and computer skills, second languages, healthful living, mathematics, science, social studies, and vocational education. It also increased funding significantly for local districts to operate such a program.

By the late 1980s, growing dissatisfaction with student achievement and concern for education in general provided the impetus for further reform. The North Carolina General Assembly passed the School Improvement and Accountability Act (Senate Bill 2) in 1989. This legislation began the process of decentralizing decision making and emphasizing local accountability. The legislation specified that school districts develop goals around performance indicators (mostly state tests) required for state accreditation. The districts would receive incentive money for certified staff if goals were achieved. As part of the release of control by the state, the districts could request waivers from state laws and policies which they felt hampered improvement efforts. They also received increased flexibility in the use of their funds.

The School Improvement and Accountability Act represented the beginning of an emphasis on school-based goal setting and accountability and set the stage for subsequent legislation which continued to push planning and accountability down to the school level. Since 1989, the Legislature has amended the School Improvement and Accountability Act a number of times to strengthen the emphasis on school-based management and focus greater accountability on schools for increasing student achievement.

In 1992, new legislation moved planning down to the school level. The legislation required a building-level committee composed of the principal, teachers, other staff, and parents to develop a school-improvement plan based on goals

established by the local board of education. Flexibility was granted in funding, staffing, delivery of instruction, and utilization of resources to achieve student-performance goals. The principal was required to submit the plan to the faculty for a vote and, if accepted by the faculty, forward the plan to the local board of education for acceptance or rejection.

The 1992 legislation also required the creation of a state Task Force on Site-Based Management. The role of the Task Force was to monitor the implementation of the School Improvement and Accountability Act of 1989 (particularly school-improvement plans), to provide advice on the provision of training and assistance to districts to implement SBM, and to report recommendations for policy changes to the General Assembly. The first report was made to the General Assembly in 1994-95. The second report went to the State Board of Education in 1995.

One problem with the early state legislation (as reported in the 1995 Task Force on Site-Based Management Report to the Education Oversight Committee) was that the format for the improvement plans was prescribed by the state. That is, districts had to set expectations for increases in performance on all state-identified performance indicators (54+ indicators). In addition, rigid timelines for submitting plans to the state prohibited schools and systems from doing foundational work, such as helping staff learn planning skills, developing a knowledge base around SBM, and including parents and others in required planning and data-gathering. In the report, the Task Force recommended changes to address these problems.

In meeting its requirement to reflect on state assistance provided to districts and schools, the Task Force report summarized the strategies that the state had used. Information to increase awareness of SBM was provided through booklets, videos, telecasts, brochures, and conferences. A training program covering skills such as consensus building, problem solving, team building, budgeting, analyzing data, and understanding legislation was developed and piloted in the state's regional technical assistance centers. Other training for teacher and administrator teams was offered through a Teacher Academy. Finally, six school districts were supported in forming the North Carolina Network to provide an organized way to problem solve and learn from each other about strategies for restructuring.

In 1995, legislation charged the State Board of Education with the responsibility to reorganize the Department of Public Instruction to more effectively improve student achievement while increasing local control and flexibility. The State Board of Education developed the School-Based Management and Accountability Program (ABC Plan). One of the goals of this legislation was to

increase local flexibility and control while tightening the accountability requirements for individual schools. The ABC Plan was "based upon an accountability, recognition, assistance, and intervention process in order to hold each school and the school's personnel accountable for improved student performance in the school." Beginning in 1996-97, the legislation applied to all K-8 schools. High schools will be included in 1997-98.

The ABC Plan is designed to recognize schools that achieve student-performance goals based on longitudinal analyses of state test results. It is also intended to identify schools that are low-performing and establish state assistance teams to help those schools. While encouraging school-improvement councils and school-based use of staff development funds, the state has also tightened up on accountability and defined acceptable performance through the use of expected and exemplary growth rates. Thus, SBM now operates under the umbrella of significant consequences for lack of acceptable growth on test scores as well as recognition and incentives for exceptional growth or performance.

It is too soon to know how the imposition of rewards and sanctions will impact the quality of SBM and emerging school cultures. Will the ABC Plan lead to better decisions and more motivated faculties because of the monetary rewards and recognition offered, or more conservative decision making because of fears that any significant programmatic change might lower test scores, or both? The research on the impact of state accountability systems (Koretz, 1996; Smith, 1991) suggests that there are both positive (increased attention to skills covered by the tests) and unintended negative consequences (e.g., decreased emphasis on science and social studies instruction because they don't "count," lower staff morale).

The impact of the 1996 ABC Amendments to the School Improvement and Accountability Act on some school cultures may be especially pronounced given the unprecedented sanctions for low performance, including possible loss of jobs by teachers and principals, and possible school takeover by state assistance teams. Will SBM within a school that is in danger of sanctions lead to more conflict and competitiveness among staff or a greater desire to work together? There is much to be learned about the interrelationship of SBM (the quality and kind of decisions made about improving education at the school site) and the impact of state accountability systems.

In summary, legislation enacted since 1989 has consistently strengthened local school-based management and accountability. Legislation required broad-based representation in school-improvement planning and, at the same time, established consequences for schools not meeting student performance goals. Parents have been perceived as important partners in the school-improvement pro-

cess as evidenced by legislation in 1997 that requires that parents be elected by other parents to participate on the school-improvement council. (The State Board and Department of Public Instruction recently produced a School Improvement Team Parents' Handbook to clarify the parent role.)

Selected components of North Carolina legislation that established and strengthened local control of school-improvement planning are summarized below:

1989 The School Improvement and Accountability Act—Senate Bill 2

- Voluntary local improvement plan with 3-5 year student-performance goals and annual measures in meeting goals
- A required, state-provided set of student-performance indicators (mostly state tests) for measuring and assessing student performance
- Funds for differentiated pay based on meeting student-performance goals
- Increased flexibility in expending state funds
- Ability to request waivers from state laws, regulations, or policies that inhibited schools from implementing desired action plans

1992 Amendment—House Bill 1340

- Revised the requirement for the development of local school-improvement plans to include a three-year time frame for establishing student-performance goals
- Required the involvement of a district advisory panel for school improvement consisting of teachers, school administrators, other school staff, and parents
- Required that each school develop strategies for attaining district student-performance goals
- Required that each school staff member vote on the school-improvement plan
- Allowed for waivers only at the school building level and only under the conditions specified in the school-improvement plan
- Required school building-level improvement reports

- Created a Task Force on Site-Based Management to monitor the implementation of the School Improvement and Accountability Act of 1989, provide advice on the provision of training and assistance to local districts to facilitate SBM, and report findings to the General Assembly

1993 Amendment—Senate Bill 27

- Expanded local school-improvement plans beyond just test scores to include additional indicators related to community and parent involvement, professional development of teachers, and school climate
- Required that the school principal disclose the total allocation of staff development funds

1995 Amendment—Senate Bill 20

- Charged the State Board, in consultation with the Task Force, with developing procedures and guidelines for schools
- Increased budget flexibility
- Eliminated the performance indicators; identified reading, writing, and mathematics as the state focus

1996 The School Accountability and Management Program—Senate Bill 1139 (ABCs legislation)

- Focused on student performance in the basics of reading, writing, and mathematics
- Required parental involvement as part of the school-improvement plan
- Established a process of resolving disputes between local boards and schools in the development of school-improvement plans
- Awarded monetary recognition for schools that exceed goals
- Identified low-performing schools and created assistance teams that the Board could assign to low-performing schools
- Allowed possible dismissal or removal of personnel in continually low-performing schools

1997 The Excellent Schools Act—Senate Bill 272

- Required that certified staff in identified low-performing schools that are assigned an assistance team take a general knowledge competency test (in 1999-2000, all certified staff in all low-performing schools will be tested)
- Increased standards for teacher preparation programs, enhanced initial certification requirements, and enhanced standards for continuing certification and more frequent evaluation of teachers
- Streamlined career dismissal procedures for removing poor teachers
- Required the provision of written notification to parents that a school has been identified as low-performing

1997 Amendments—House Bill 977

- Required that parents serving on the school-improvement team be elected by parents of students enrolled in the local school

Chapter Two

From Policy to Practice: What Has Been Learned About Implementing Site-Based Management?

To determine the effectiveness of SBM, the North Carolina Task Force on Site-Based Management conducted two surveys (in 1994 and 1995) after the first and second years of implementation to gather feedback from those affected in local districts. What was learned from these data? The authors of the report concluded that site-based management is being successfully implemented in some schools and is being implemented less successfully in others. Success is relative, and implementation is an evolutionary process—proceeding at different rates according to local needs, climate, and resources.

The majority of educators supported the concept, but as with any change, implementation varies, with some sites more successful than others. The section that follows examines the results of the North Carolina survey of local districts (1995) as a way of understanding the implementation issues of concern to educators.

Survey Results

The survey sample in 1995 included 2,250 teachers, 250 principals, and 500 PTA presidents. The response rates were 39% for teachers (869), 55% for principals (137), and 25% for PTA presidents (124). All survey items were answered on a five-point scale with two positive-response categories, two negative, and one neutral. Because two of the response categories were positively worded and two negatively worded, for ease of interpretation, the five categories were collapsed into three: positive, neutral, and negative responses.

Perceptions of Effectiveness

- The majority of all three groups surveyed reported believing in the power of SBM to improve student performance, as shown below.

To what extent do you believe that effective site-based management will lead to improved student performance?

	Negative (1-2)	Neutral (3)	Positive (4-5)
Teachers	14%	19%	67%
Principals	11%	26%	63%
PTA	17%	21%	62%

- All three groups reported believing that teachers/staff want to participate in SBM; however, principals were slightly less positive than the other groups.

At your school, to what extent do you believe that teachers/staff want to participate in site-based management/shared decision making?

	Negative (1-2)	Neutral(3)	Positive (4-5)
Teachers	5%	10%	85%
Principals	14%	17%	69%
PTA	5%	15%	80%

- The reality of implementation is that respondents reported less agreement on the effectiveness of SBM at their schools. Less than half (42%) of the teachers agreed that SBM had been implemented effectively at their schools. However, 77% of the principals reported positive perceptions of implementation. This suggests that principals and teachers have different criteria for effectiveness.

How effectively has site-based management been implemented at your school, with teachers and staff having significant involvement in shared decision making?

	Negative (1-2)	Neutral(3)	Positive (4-5)
Teachers	37%	21%	42%
Principals	4%	19%	77%
PTA	28%	17%	55%

Perceptions of Implementation Issues

The survey findings have been organized into a discussion of four kinds of implementation issues: preparation/training, decision-making power, structure/teaming, and finding time.

Preparation/Training

The research on effective SBM discusses the importance of providing teachers and principals good training/preparation for their new roles. Researchers at the League of Professional Schools suggest that the first step in implementing SBM is to increase capacity for group work and teamwork skills, to build trust and help staff understand how to disagree and even how to conduct effective meetings. These are the basic skills of SBM.

> *The schools where SBM worked had greater proportions of the staff take part in professional development. In particular, training in the area of decision-making skills was not limited to members of the school council. Sources of training at successful SBM schools included the district office, universities, and even more non-traditional education circles like businesses, which provided training in management and decision making. The schools also expanded the range of content areas for training beyond the typical areas of curriculum and instruction to include participation in decision making, leadership responsibilities (e.g., running meetings, budgeting, interviewing,) and the process of school improvement (Wohlstetter and Mohrman, 1996).*

The North Carolina data show that lack of preparation/training is an issue at some school sites.

- Twenty-seven percent of the principals responded "No" to the question: *Has your committee/team had training on how to develop and implement a School Improvement Plan?* Similarly, less than 20% of the principals indicated that the Site-Based Committee had received training in any of the following: conflict resolution, shared decision making, problem-solving, consensus building, or team dynamics.

- A majority of the teachers not currently serving on site-based committees were either neutral or negative about the extent to which they understood their new roles and responsibilities.

To what extent do teachers and staff know and understand their new roles and responsibilities with site-based management?

	Negative	Neutral	Positive
All Teachers	34%	24%	42%
On council	19%	24%	57%
Not on council	39%	24%	36%
Principals	12%	30%	58%

- Even more of the respondents were negative about parents' understanding of their new roles and responsibilities.

To what extent do parents on the committee know and understand their new roles and responsibilities with site-based management?

	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Teachers	48%	29%	23%
Principals	38%	30%	32%
PTA	46%	24%	30%

Open-ended comments such as the following reflected some of the concerns about lack of training with SBM:

At the present time many teachers feel that SBM is too time-consuming. Because of lack of training, many teachers make decisions based on individual wants and not what is best schoolwide.

It appears that schools vary greatly. Faculty are involved at varied levels; parents are seldom involved. We need training and time to get it right. Please stay with this long enough to do it right. We seem to abandon every new idea without a fair trial.

Until every principal, board of education member, and central office staff member are committed and trained in SBM, we will continue to have the authoritarian-type decision making that we now have.

Decision-Making Power

Woven throughout the discussions of decentralization is the concern that schools are so deeply enmeshed in federal, state, and district rules, regulations, and prescriptions that the creation of SBM teams cannot ensure new degrees of decision-making power (Murphy, 1995). The degree to which schools feel constrained is a key issue in understanding how well site-based decision making is working.

Teachers were asked to what extent do/should teachers and staff in their school share in meaningful decision making in each of the following areas:

	Percent Positively Reporting on "Do"	Percent Positively Reporting on "Should"
Curriculum	46%	93%
Instruction Strategies	63%	97%
Budget	23%	73%
Schedule	37%	92%
Discipline	50%	96%
Personnel	14%	50%
Rules and Regulations	40%	94%
Staff Development	54%	97%

- Thus, there are significant discrepancies between perceptions of what should be happening and what is happening.

What are the barriers to getting the decision making down to the teacher level? Shifts in power and influence flow in four directions: from state agencies to school districts, from district offices to individual school sites, from administrators to teachers, and from professional educators to parents. The survey results illustrate concerns about the lack of true empowerment for decision making at some of these levels.

State to District

The focus group and survey data collected in 1994 and 1995 revealed that there were some school-based concerns that important decisions had been made at the state and district level and handed down.

The initial concerns centered around too much prescription from the state on performance indicators, unrealistic timelines for the planning process, and lack

of budget and waiver flexibility. Subsequent legislation addressed these issues, so some of these feelings may have changed.

District to School

In order for site-based management to work, power must be devolved from the district to school sites. In *Assessment of School-Based Management* (1996), the authors suggest that making good use of power at the school level depends on superintendents and school boards. In the districts studied, the central office became "helpers, not tellers," with schools treated as "customers" of central office departments.

The results in North Carolina show that not all districts are moving to decentralize their power and become more service-oriented in their relationship to school staff.

- Support from the central office was perceived positively by about 40% of teachers and 50% of principals responding.

  To what extent does your central office demonstrate support for site-based management?

	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Teachers	35%	28%	37%
Principals	24%	26%	50%
PTA	39%	30%	31%

Problems with the central office were also mentioned in open-ended comments:

> *Superintendents need to understand what this is and not attempt to run things from the central office and call it site-based. Much more training is needed for everyone before this will work well.*

> *The central office needs to totally support it and give schools time, authority, and power to plan their program. That is not being done. Unless/until local school boards agree with SBM, our efforts are going to be futile. Staff are already frustrated when they expend time and other resources to develop plans, only to have the local board veto the plan. Yet the local school is still being held accountable. We cannot have it both ways!*

Good idea, but tied up in too much paperwork which has to be filled out exactly the way the central office says.

SBM will not work in our system because the system will not let go of their purse strings or their total governing power on policy. They are not going to let one school develop plans that will be different or unique because they will be too vulnerable to problems they cannot foresee or head off.

It has been our experience that SBM does not work if the powers that be in the Central Office do not back away and let it happen.

This somewhat undeveloped role of the district office in terms of advocating for SBM and empowering schools is probably more typical than not in most states. Researchers from the Professional League of Schools indicated that principals report little leadership or help from district offices in terms of implementing site-based management; they report being "on their own." Many districts' leaders may still be struggling with how to give up some power but still "lead" and hold schools accountable. (The SERVE publication *Using Accountability as a Lever for Changing the Culture of Schools: Examining District Strategies* describes how one district established a service orientation toward schools while at the same time implementing strategies that encouraged accountability at the student, teacher, and school levels. More examples and stories of how this district role plays out are needed.)

Principal to Teachers

Even though a district may decentralize to a school site, the principal may retain the balance of power. SBM assumes that there will be a shift in power from control of all important issues by the principal to some degree of open discussion with the staff. Under this dispersed power, teachers should have more power in determining how the budget is spent, who is hired, and what curricular and instructional designs are employed.

Wohlstetter and Mohrman (1996) identified principals who were unwilling to give up power as a factor in schools with failed site-based management.

> *Many principals in struggling schools were perceived as too autocratic by their staffs, who reported that principals tend to dominate all decisions (pg. 4).*

Successful principals tended to

> *. . .delegate to subcommittees responsibilities such as material selection, budget development, and professional development schedules. What emerged*

was shared leadership among a broad range of individuals throughout the school. In many cases, for example, teachers took the lead in introducing ideas about new instructional practices. The most successful principals were the ones who worked to coordinate the efforts of these many teacher leaders so that they involved whole faculties and all efforts were oriented toward the school vision. Aside from formal collaboration, principals in schools where SBM worked also fostered informal communities by scheduling common lunch periods for students and staff and common break times for teachers (pg. 7).

Room for progress with principal leadership was evidenced by the North Carolina survey data.

- Teachers were more likely than principals to say that decisions were made by administration.

	SBM team makes decisions seeking input from the faculty	Administration allows input from committee but determines final decisions
Teachers	35%	49%
Principals	78%	20%

Many of the open-ended comments from teachers and parents reflected concerns about principals who were unwilling to share their power.

As far as I know, we do not have SBM. We have a few people on the School Improvement Team who have been selected by the principal. As PTA president, I have been made to feel my input was not needed. The principal makes all the decisions. The principal is the absolute cornerstone of the entire SBM philosophy. When they are absolutely committed to it, it works, but not without serious and constant attention. In that regard, our school is fortunate.

Principals who do not comply with the philosophy of SBM should be held more responsible for making sure the school site does maintain a shared process with both teachers and parents.

The implementation in each school in our county varies depending on the principal's interpretation and desires. Our school turns in papers that look like we helped devise the plan—but in essence, we just sign after the principal has written the plan.

It's a joke. The real decisions are made by the principal and the central office. Site-based decisions are usually manipulated the way the principal wants them made. If you don't agree with the principal, you're not a team player!

It is no easy task to go from a typical school culture of isolated teaching to one of a professional community united by a common vision and committed to honest looks at instructional practice and holding each other accountable. Thus, it is not surprising that principals struggle with their roles.

Allen and Glickman (1997) offer the following insights on site-based management from "veteran" principals:

- Principals should stop being the "fixer" or the one with the answers and begin enabling others to develop solutions (if it's a big problem, we organize a task force).
- They should model discussions of importance by constantly focusing on curriculum, instruction, assessment, and staff development (less discussion about rules, lunchroom behavior, etc.).
- They should listen to—rather than talk at—teachers.
- They should encourage a wide range of involvement, inviting all teachers out of the classroom (not just a select few).
- They should support teacher experimentation, grant professional autonomy, provide resources, and view failure as an opportunity to learn.

School Educators to Parents

As with the other transfers of powers, involving parents can be difficult for school staff. Schools are still struggling with how to successfully involve parents in decision making. Problems mentioned by principals and teachers included parents not having the time, not having the right motivation (they get involved when their child has a problem), not being available for last-minute meetings, and not being knowledgeable about school functioning.

Words from PTA representatives:

This is a great concept, but the principal must allow it to happen. At our school, the School Improvement Plan was written with NO parental input. Parents on the Advisory Team were shown the plan at the last minute. How can parents effectively participate if they are totally shut out of the process?

I have been very active in our school's PTA for three years and have seen very little chance for parents to participate in any decision making.

Structure/Teaming

Wohlstetter and Mohrman (1996) report that the degree to which whole staff involvement is encouraged is a critical difference between successful and unsuccessful SBM sites. That is, schools with just one school-improvement team or council were less successful than those who had multiple teams with all teachers serving in some way and experiencing conversations about improvement. With just one team, often a we-versus-they mentality existed among faculty with some perceiving that the team represented an elite power base.

> *In schools where SBM worked, multiple, teacher-led, decision-making teams were created that cut across the school both horizontally and vertically to involve a broad range of school-level constituents in the decision-making process. Many of these groups were designed to facilitate interaction across the traditional boundaries of departments and grade levels. Common structures included subcommittees of the school council that were open to membership by interested teachers or parents and teacher teams that were actively included in the consensus-building process for school decisions. The decision-making groups, set up to address such topics as curriculum, assessment, and professional development, also helped focus participants' energy on specific tasks rather than on abstractions such as "culture" or "empowerment." The net effect was that in schools where SBM worked there was a great deal of communication and dialogue around specific projects.* ***The most effective school councils were those that served largely to coordinate and integrate the activities of the various decision-making groups operating throughout the school*** *(pg. 5).*

In the same vein, Murphy (1995) states,

> *What we seem to be learning is that each teacher needs to be engaged directly in discussions about decisions that impact his or her students.* ***The implication here is that SBM schools need to establish mechanisms to engage faculty in small decision-making groups, groups small enough to permit real dialogue throughout the team.*** *These groups should address important decisions across the array of issues—budget, personnel, curriculum, goals, and organizational structure. Decisions can then be pooled and shared with the school council for final decision making (pg. 60).*

There were no questions in the survey that pertained directly to structure. Nevertheless, there are some indications from the open-ended comments below that some schools are experiencing problems due to limited staff participation.

> *In our school, the same "old horses" get together, elect each other, and nothing changes. New blood is needed.*

> *Often what our committee decides is not shared with the rest of the staff. Our committee also does not consist of a representative group. There are many departments that are not represented. I think this defeats the purpose of the management team.*

> *Teachers feel intimidated when they make their views known. The opinion of a few faculty members is sought and considered, but the majority of us feel our views are neither wanted nor respected.*

Finding Time

One concern that emerges in many reports on SBM is the lack of quality time for teams to meet and have meaningful conversations about school improvement. The sample of comments below from the 1995 survey illuminates that concern.

> *In principle, SBM is a great idea. In practice, it is difficult to do. We simply do not have the time it takes. Our job of teaching is more difficult than ever. How do we find the time to effectively do SBM?*

> *Time for meetings seems to be one of our biggest problems and concerns. It doesn't seem right to use teaching time, and people are too busy in the afternoons and evenings.*

> *My concern is that we are involved in many meetings in order to do SBM, but we have no release time to meet during school, nor are we paid for our extra time this involves. We still must be prepared for teaching the next day.*

Murphy concludes that

> *. . . case studies of SBM suggest that time can be expanded by adding to the total time pool available (e.g., providing time for retreats before the school year begins) and/or by reconfiguring the school day or teacher tasks to reduce the load on staff (e.g., providing an extra preparation period, grouping students differently to provide development time for teachers). Ulti-*

mately, in North Carolina and elsewhere, the type of thoughtful efforts needed to augment work time are largely conspicuous by their absence. Thus, in North Carolina, time remains a significant barrier to the implementation of site-based management (pg. 40).

Similarly, the Wohlstetter and Mormon study reports that often SBM fails because too many schools assume business as usual with average levels of commitment and energy. The researchers found that

> *. . .SBM is a time-consuming and complicated process that places high demands on all individuals involved. Schools struggled with SBM when they simply layered SBM on top of what they were already doing. Meetings ended up being held after school and frequently were poorly attended. Such schools did not redesign their schedules to encourage teacher interaction during the regular school day (pg. 5).*

Researchers at the Professional League of Schools (Allen and Glickman, 1997) report that some schools have developed ways to deal with the lack of time:

> *Some schools build time into the yearly calendar. For example, one school sets aside five days during the year for their "action research" team to meet and analyze data with the cost of substitutes built into the annual budget.*
>
> *Some schools provide extra planning times through grants or other sources for committee leaders.*

In summary, North Carolina legislation requires that each school form a representative group of stakeholders to develop a school-improvement plan. Undoubtedly, most schools are in compliance with this requirement. However, the survey results and other research indicate that compliance with this requirement does not mean that most schools could be considered as having successfully implemented SBM.

> *Placing around a table three teachers, two parents, one principal, and a student who serve on a "school-improvement team" does not make either for a team or for school improvement. Rather it makes for three teachers, two parents, a principal, and a student sitting around a table (pg. xiv, Barth, 1990).*

If the important decisions about curriculum, instruction, assessment, staff development, and scheduling are still being made by central office or school administrators, if staff are unable to disagree honestly and deal with issues and

conflict openly, if adequate time for quality meetings is not found, if power is held by a small number of select faculty, if principals do not know how to focus discussions on teaching and learning issues, or if simplistic plans based on inadequate research are developed, then SBM is not working as well as it could.

In considering the North Carolina data in light of findings from other research, we find striking similarities in the issues that emerge. Lack of preparation/training, unwillingness of some central offices and principals to give up power, inadequately conceptualized teaming structures, and difficulties in finding quality time to come together will likely be ongoing impediments that must be addressed.

Chapter Three

How Do Schools Get Started with Site-Based Management in a Way That Involves All Staff?

Some schools are experiencing success with SBM, while others are learning from those schools' experiences. Below are brief descriptions of how some schools have gotten started with SBM in a way that is inclusive and motivating for all staff.

Professional League of Schools

Allen and Glickman (1997), in observing schools in the Professional League of Schools, note that schools often evolve from less-exclusive to more-inclusive structures over time. Rather than electing representatives from departments, some schools break faculty into small, heterogeneous groups to meet regularly and discuss issues that they, in turn, send to the school-improvement council. Each small group has an elected representative on the school council. As the represented groups become smaller "the stronger each person's voice in the decision-making process becomes" (pg. 24).

Other schools learned that "while it is relatively simple to create a leadership team, it takes hard work to keep everyone involved in the process after leaders have been identified" (pg. 26). One approach to opening up the ownership is to use task forces of those not on the leadership team for fact finding, drafting action plans, and implementing the action plan. For example, in one high school the issue of ninth grade failure rates was brought to the attention of the improvement team. The team asked for a volunteer task force which spent two years planning and implementing needed changes to improve this problem. Using this approach, decisions were no longer made "within the closed confines of leadership team meetings"; small groups (formal and ad hoc) gave everyone an opportunity to participate.

Smithfield Middle School, Johnston County, North Carolina

In this middle school that applied Total Quality Management principles (SERVE, 1995), a number of cross-functional teams were established to promote continual improvement in the areas of technology, student services, communication, school climate, curriculum and instruction, and crisis intervention. The seventh team was the leadership team (called the quality council). The principal developed a Team Handbook (1993) which described how teams were expected to function, the goals and functions of each team, the roles of team members, and a vision for how an ideal team should work together. Distributed leadership and teaming were core values of the school, and this was made clear in the Team Handbook.

W. Fred Scott Elementary, Thomasville, Georgia

In this elementary school, when the principal decided that she would like to obtain more faculty involvement in decision making, the first team formed was a volunteer curriculum/assessment committee which looked at curriculum alignment, instructional practices, and textbook/materials selection (SERVE, 1995). By choosing to start with a curriculum/assessment team, she emphasized the importance of restructuring teaching and learning and involving faculty in actions that would make a difference for students.

The team's first focus area was the extent of higher-order questioning used in math classrooms. The team collected data by observing all teachers' classes and tallying the kinds of questions asked. Because teachers realized that the data were to be looked at schoolwide and not used to "judge" individual teachers, they willingly participated. The results showed that in most classes, math questioning was at a low level. Training was provided and in a subsequent year, the observations were conducted again showing substantial increases in higher-order questioning.

Each year the curriculum/assessment team identifies a focus area. Subsequent to the success of the curriculum/assessment team, a school council was formed to handle more administrative issues (discipline, rules, etc.). All faculty rotate into service on these two teams.

Jesse Wharton Elementary School, Greensboro, North Carolina

With a new principal and significant backing from corporate sponsors interested in upgrading the reputation of the school, this school embraced the ideas of teacher empowerment and continual improvement. The effort was initiated with a five-day planning retreat for all school staff facilitated by consultants. It focused on helping staff learn to know and trust each other and on developing mission and belief statements. The school's teaming structure consists of six committees: staff development, climate, technology, curriculum, and communication, with the overall coordination provided by a school leadership planning committee. During the first year, the principal and staff continued to work hard on improving the organizational culture (trust and collaboration) and on improving educational processes (particularly reading instruction). The support from the corporate sponsors enabled the staff to access a variety of training and consultant resources. The staff is currently implementing a coaching system in which every staff member is assigned to a small team which works on problems together.

As these examples suggest, there is no right way to form teams. Instead the guiding principle may be one of maximum teacher choice and engagement without creating a "busy" or overloaded team structure.

Chapter Four

Considering the Roles of State, District, and School Leaders: What Can Be Done to Help Schools Realize More Powerful Models of SBM?

State Role

By establishing a Site-Based Management Task Force to collect implementation data and review policy, North Carolina policymakers demonstrated a commitment to ongoing policy review. Such an ongoing review process can help states be more sensitive to local needs. In addition to this monitoring function, in North Carolina, the Department of Public Instruction has also provided training opportunities for school teams, helped schools and districts network to share practices, and disseminated information. Another strategy for consideration might be establishing a "critical friends" service so that a school or district could request a site visit to help them reflect on their strengths and weaknesses. Or the state might consider identifying demonstration sites where great success with decentralization had been realized.

District Role

The data suggest that district leaders can undermine SBM by continuing to make all the important decisions. Models of how district offices support schools need to be described and shared. The survey results suggest that some districts are having difficulty finding the middle ground between too much control and too little support and encouragement.

Districts might consider whether they have adequately addressed the following:

Leadership Issues. . .

- Established clear parameters for decision making (one-third of 30 principals surveyed in a SERVE interview study indicated that they had not had adequate district support in this area)

- Articulated a vision for what SBM means
- Modeled effective teaming by creating districtwide teams and task forces (e.g., to review improvement plans, develop technology plans, conduct action research, or allocate staff development funds)
- Practiced empowering leadership behaviors (build trust, support innovation and risk-taking, listen rather than talk)

Training/Support Issues. . .

- Supported school-based research and evaluation, offered assistance with data collection and analysis, required needs assessment and evaluation data as part of the planning process
- Developed or located training for principals and teacher leaders on Facilitative Leadership, Total Quality Management, or other approaches that encourage management styles appropriate for developing a "learning community"
- Provided opportunities for sharing of best practices and strategies for successful SBM (in a recent SERVE study, 14 of 30 principals interviewed about SBM indicated that they had not had "exposure to well-designed, well-implemented models of SBM")

Feedback/Accountability Issues . .

- Monitored principals' success at creating new school cultures and encourages self-assessment (some districts use the Baldrige criteria to help principals understand a new vision for management)
- Visited schools regularly to better understand and comment on the extent to which the schools are functioning as professional communities

School Role

The data suggest that autocratic principals undermine SBM. Indications are that facilitating change in a site-based manner is a tricky process that takes much skill. In a survey of 30 principals, SERVE found that 19 of the 30 indicated that their school needed more assistance with "developing the principal's expertise in facilitating and managing change." Adequate training, a teaming structure that engages all faculty, clarity on team functioning and purposes (perhaps as articulated through a school teaming handbook), and an emerging vision for teaching and learning are some of the pieces of the puzzle.

Principals might consider whether there is

Adequate structure/teaming

- Cross-functional (e.g., curriculum or assessment) work teams or task forces (to address specific problems) that involve all staff in examining aspects of school functioning
- An effective professional growth program that encourages individual goal-setting and provides support for achieving school objectives

Adequate training/preparation

- Sufficient training, preparation, and resources for teams to function effectively (these might include training in conflict resolution, effective meetings, and group techniques and the development of a school handbook on team goals and roles)
- Networking and visits to other schools

Sufficient time

- Time set aside for teams to meet on a regular basis

Substantive leadership

- Adequate role modeling of leadership behaviors where leaders build trust, establish a constancy of purpose or focus, listen rather than talk, and support risk-taking and innovation
- Support for a research-based approach to school improvement planning, collecting data whenever possible to inform decision makers
- Use of national, state, and district curriculum frameworks or curriculum audits as a way of focusing on curriculum development needs

Schools, as unique collections of individuals, have different histories that ultimately make them more or less amenable to SBM (Glickman and Allen, 1997). Each school must find its own way in becoming a controller of its own destiny. There is no quick fix or top-down policy that can make all schools successful in managing their own improvement. Progress depends on being willing to take honest looks at how things are going. We hope this report will help schools, districts, and states think about where they are on the road to SBM and where they want to be and that it has provided helpful suggestions on ways to get there.

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